

A NEW CRANFORD: BEING A MORE OR LESS TRUE ACCOUNT OF AN EXPERIMENT

DEDICATED TO OUR DEAR J. B., WHO OF ALL OTHERS BEST
UNDERSTANDS WHAT PROMPTED ITS UNDERTAKING

By ISABEL McISAAC

Late Superintendent Illinois Training-School, Chicago

MANY and varied are the problems arising from the "New Woman" question, but of them all none comes nearer the nerves than that of the homeless wage-earning woman who is passing or past middle life.

The present generation is only now beginning to realize that "the proof of a pudding is in the eating," and while this pudding has much to commend it in generous size, shape, and color, there are not a few who find grievous fault with its flavor and digestibility. In every city and town of the Republic may be found large numbers of teachers, doctors, nurses, and business women who are practically homeless and in most cases unsatisfied. I do not include the Grand Army of Selfish Ones who are too indifferent to keep their homes, but mean the women who toil for their daily bread and exist, not live, in hotels and boarding-houses. In the enthusiasm of youth such a life may be bearable, but after a few years women of the right sort find something desperately wanting, a something which defines itself as the wish for homes of their own.

Nurses are often charged with lack of thrift, which cannot be denied, but the nursing spirit and the commercial spirit are not compatible, and it would seem nearer the truth that money-getting and good nursing do not go well together rather than that we are all given to self-indulgence. To all of us there come to mind unhappy instances which thrust themselves into our peace of mind of hospital and private-duty nurses who have outlived their active usefulness and are gradually crowded off the highway of comfortable living. Some of them have given years of uninterrupted service to institutions, years of difficult toil when the day's work was from ten to twenty-four hours long, hours whose numbers were curtailed neither by labor unions nor the pity of Boards of Managers; others were private duty nurses who were forced to drop back because they could no longer endure the long hours, self-effacement, confinement, and weariness of their lot; we find both classes not equal to hospital work nor private duty, with insufficient means and, worse than all, homeless, their only refuge the pitifully meagre, restricted life in back-hall bedrooms, and of their future—who knows?

Such a life has always been a nightmare to Euphemia and me, and as our years began to accumulate and we neared the dividing-line between climbing the hill and descending it we looked over a great plain spread before us and decided that the back-hall bedroom and the Old Ladies' Home might have charms we did not appreciate, but we preferred a corner, no matter how small, which would be our very own, where we might "gang our own gait" and have a bed and a loaf for those kindred spirits who would gladly share them with that affection and understanding which money never buys.

After several years of desultory planning and threats the time came which we knew to be the right time to change, and we bought a small fruit farm, whereupon all of our friends, enemies, relations, and relations-in-law with one accord expressed their various points of view.

"You don't know how to grow fruit," said they.

"We will learn," said we.

"What do you know about incubators?" said they.

"Any nurse can manage an incubator," said we.

"You will die of loneliness," said they.

"Oh happy day when we may have a chance to be lonely!" said we, and so on *ad infinitum*.

After the first outburst we all took time to breathe, as we could not run away without due warning, and Euphemia spent her holidays doing camping-out housekeeping while she skirmished with carpenter and plumber getting our small house ready. During the interim, like the cow, we "considered" names for our estate, names ranging from a small village in the top of Scotland to the purely euphonious sentimental titles suggested by novel-reading young girls, and finally decided that, being two spinsters of uncertain age and prospects, Cranford would be most suitable, and Cranford it is, with apologies to Mrs. Gaskell.

When Euphemia tearfully returned to town from her vacation we resolved that—whereas, she could go to Cranford six months before me, and, whereas, she could not live alone, and, whereas, we had no notion of getting to be "twisty," selfish old maids, and, whereas, the public institutions were full of homeless children quite as forlorn as homeless nurses—we take a boy from the Home for the Friendless, which we did. I cannot say that our decision entirely commended itself to the Points of View, and when they all "fell a sighing and sobbing" it was in truth like the birds at Cock Robin's funeral, but we were undismayed, and Tom, aged ten, now fills his niche in our ready-made family.

While we were waiting for our release dear J. B. and her small nephew had a four-months' picnic at Cranford getting rest and renewed

strength, and proving the farm to be what we most wished for, a haven for tired saints as well as sinners.

It was January when we—Euphemia, Tom, Puttel, the cat, and I—went to Cranford to stay, or, rather, I went to help them begin house-keeping.

The season is not propitious for moving and our roads were full of snow, necessitating a long detour through fields and golf links to reach the house, but we found a fire laid in that neighborly fashion unknown in cities, and with our lunch-basket we got on famously until the kitchen range was in place and our boxes and barrels unpacked.

There surely is nothing more satisfying than making a home after one has learned that a house needs to be neither large nor fine to be a "truly home."

Our hospital experiences made us independent of all sorts of workmen when the little things had to be done.

Taking up a quarter-rail to fit linoleum to the kitchen floor was not an easy task, and W., our colored friend, said we could not do it, but Euphemia did do it beautifully, although no nun in Lent ever had stiffer knees.

Our predecessors left the shades at the windows, and as our bank account was not exactly pléthoric, we decided to repair them; they were all the same color but of every shape and size of misfit imaginable, so between my wrestlings with the sewing-machine and Euphemia's troubles with the springs in the inside, which all ran down like alarm-clocks, we had a day of wild excitement.

It is astonishing how one forgets such simple things. No probationer toiling over circulation ever had a harder time following its devious windings than I had with that wretched thread. My first seam looked like the temperature chart of a malaria patient, and miles of thread were sacrificed to vicious tangles on the wrong side.

We will have to put the Missus with her back to the shades we pieced, for she is one of those terrifying housekeepers who has an eye to all defects and reduces lesser mortals to abject misery by her perfection. She has promised to give due notice of her visits that we may be prepared, and we shall beseech the weather man not to throw too strong sunlight upon our handiwork.

When it was all done and the familiar books and pictures in place we gave ourselves time to sit down and say, "This is home, not a back-hall bedroom, not a home with a capital H, not a noisy, relentless city, but just a simple little corner of our own where we may say 'My house is my castle,' " although castles are not usually seven-room cottages.

The big south window of our sitting-room looks across a wide stretch of fair country to a shining river many miles away, and we may see trains and steamers from the lake coming and going from the two towns in sight, and thus we touch the busy world and yet are not of it.

(To be continued.)

THE SOUGHT GRAIL

ONE said, let me seek in the weary wold
For the mystical, magical cup of gold—
The cup that our Master touched, when He
Sate feasting at eve in the upper room,
And while as an omen of instant gloom
The shadow was seen of “the shameful tree.”
There John and Andrew and Petrus saw,
And they touched the cup with a reverent awe.

Then answered another and said, I say
That, wherever the yearning of love makes way,
Whoso blesses the gifts of God
Has found the path that the Master trod,
And whoso utters the words He said—
“This day give us our daily bread”—
Has touched with finger the cup of gold;
Then what if he never the chalice hold?

And then another was heard to say,
There is ever a good and a better way.
It is little to us who His bidding do
To search for a chattel the whole world through;
For love and wisdom and life shall fail
And many may miss of the holy grail,
Yet a kindly deed with a kindly word
Do hallow the commonest cup conferred.
Can charity ever its purpose fail,
Since the chalice of love is the holy grail?

Yet I thought that I still would fain behold
That mystical, magical cup of gold—
The cup that our Master touched when He
In the “upper room” with the “two or three”
Drank of the mingled mystic wine,
With you and with me and with yours and mine.

HENRY CLARK.